

Members

Rep. Dennis Avery, Chairperson
Rep. Carolene Mays
Rep. David Cheatham
Rep. Thomas Knollman
Rep. Suzanne Crouch
Rep. Jackie Walorski
Sen. Vaneta Becker, Vice-Chairperson
Sen. John Waterman
Sen. Michael Delph
Sen. Connie Sipes
Sen. Glenn Howard
Sen. Timothy Skinner



INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON MISSING CHILDREN

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MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: October 2, 2007
Meeting Time: 1:00 P.M.
Meeting Place: State House, 200 W. Washington St., Room 404
Meeting City: Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number: 3

Members Present: Rep. Dennis Avery, Chairperson; Rep. David Cheatham; Rep. Thomas Knollman; Rep. Jackie Walorski; Sen. Vaneta Becker, Vice-Chairperson; Sen. Michael Delph; Sen. Glenn Howard.

Members Absent: Rep. Carolene Mays; Rep. Suzanne Crouch; Sen. John Waterman; Sen. Connie Sipes; Sen. Timothy Skinner.

Call to Order

Representative Dennis Avery, Chairperson, called the meeting to order 1:10 P.M. and the members of the Committee introduced themselves.

Department of Child Services-Transition Planning for Foster Youth

Cassandra Porter

Cassandra Porter, the Permanency Manager at the Department of Child Services (DCS), spoke about transition planning for foster youth based on questions raised at the previous meeting.

¹ Exhibits and other materials referenced in these minutes can be inspected and copied in the Legislative Information Center in Room 230 of the State House in Indianapolis, Indiana. Requests for copies may be mailed to the Legislative Information Center, Legislative Services Agency, 200 West Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2789. A fee of \$0.15 per page and mailing costs will be charged for copies. These minutes are also available on the Internet at the General Assembly homepage. The URL address of the General Assembly homepage is <http://www.in.gov/legislative/>. No fee is charged for viewing, downloading, or printing minutes from the Internet.

Ms. Porter stated that DCS has transition planning for all foster youth who are about to exit foster care. The transition planning includes transitional planning conferences that consist of meetings with the foster youth, the youth's case manager, any important adults in the youth's life, and a health care provider. The transition planning assists the youth to prepare to live on his or her own by focusing on planning for employment, education, and housing.

For foster youth whose parents' rights have been terminated, DCS has the Youth Connections program. The Youth Connections program finds caring adults with whom a youth can maintain relationships after the youth leaves foster care.

Rep. Avery asked Ms. Porter what other services are available to a youth when the youth leaves foster care. Ms. Porter replied that DCS will provide rent assistance, for up to 6 months, and an emancipation goods and services voucher, for up to \$1,000 a year. Additionally, DCS can provide education and training vouchers for post-secondary education, up to \$3,000 a year, and will assist foster youth in seeking other educational financial aid.

Sen. Delph asked Ms. Porter if DCS has a policy regarding sibling visitation for a child in foster care. Ms. Porter responded that DCS has a strong preference for sibling visitation and strongly advocates sibling visitation. Further, DCS attempts to place siblings together in foster care.

Sen. Delph next asked if DCS works with faith-based organizations. Ms. Porter responded that faith-based organizations and other non-profit organizations meet with DCS at community transition meetings and the organizations inform DCS of services that they provide.

Indiana Youth Services Association-*Unattached Youth*

Cheryl Hall-Russell

Cheryl Hall-Russell, the chief executive officer of the Indiana Youth Services Association, spoke to the Committee about unattached youth in Indiana. Ms. Hall-Russell also provided the Committee with a "Position Brief on 'Unattached/Unaccompanied Youth.'" (Attached as Exhibit 1.)

Ms. Hall-Russell started her presentation by stating that there are approximately 35,000 homeless or unattached youth in Indiana. Ms. Hall-Russell recommended that the Committee legislatively define "homeless youth."

Ms. Hall-Russell also recommended that the Committee propose legislation extending the period of time, from 24 hours to 72 hours, when a shelter is required to contact a juvenile's parent or guardian if the juvenile is trying to obtain homeless services. Ms. Hall-Russell stated that this change would reflect current federal law.

Shirley Taylor

Shirley Taylor, of the Crisis Center in Gary, Indiana, spoke to the Committee about providing homeless services to youth in an urban area. Ms. Taylor explained that the Crisis Center provides shelter to runaway youth whose ages range from 6 years old to 18 years old. The services provided include housing, conflict resolution with parents, group counseling, transportation, health education, homework assistance, and assistance in returning the youth to his or her home. Ms. Taylor also provided the Committee the following statistics from 2006:

- Lake County law enforcement agencies reported 1039 homeless youth
- Lake County courts dealt with 450 homeless youth
- 55% of runaways at the Crisis Center were female and 45% are male
- The youngest runaway youth was 10 years old
- 65% of runaways returned home within two days

Gavin Mariano

Gavin Mariano, also of the Crisis Center, spoke about his experiences as a runaway youth who utilized services at the Crisis Center. Mr. Mariano recounted his experiences that led him to run away and seek assistance from the Crisis Center. After graduation from Indiana University, Mr. Mariano returned to work at the Crisis Center as a counselor.

Laura Fleming-Balmer

Laura Fleming-Balmer, the executive director of the Clark County Youth Shelter, discussed with the Committee the services her shelter provides in Southern Indiana.

Ms. Fleming-Balmer also indicated that the Clark County Youth Shelter no longer receives federal funds, and she said it is difficult for smaller shelters that serve rural areas to obtain federal funds.

Finally, Ms. Fleming-Balmer discussed the importance of Safeplace programs that assist youth in finding shelter and other homeless services. Ms. Fleming-Balmer stated that most law enforcement vehicles in Clark County are mobile Safeplace shelters and law enforcement officers are trained to help runaway youth find appropriate services.

Brady August and Spencer Jackson

Brady August, of the Street Outreach Program of St. Joseph County, introduced Spencer Jackson, an 18 year old runaway, to the Committee. Spencer told the Committee that he was sent to live with his grandmother in the South Bend area, committed some crimes, and then was incarcerated for 6 months. When he was released from being incarcerated, Spencer's grandmother would not let him live with her and he became homeless. He has been homeless, primarily living on the streets and in abandoned buildings, for one (1) year and eight (8) months. Because Spencer does not have a telephone number or address, he is not able to apply for a job, get in a job training program, or participate in a GED program.

Report from the Committee's Attorney

K.C. Norwalk, the Staff Attorney for the Committee, reported to the Committee that he had contacted the Vice President of Government Affairs at Indiana University to discuss the situation presented to the Committee at the last meeting. This situation concerned a young man who attended Indiana University, but was not allowed to return to school because his parents would not sign certain financial aid forms. The Vice President explained to Mr. Norwalk that the young man was mistakenly classified as a dependent of his parents, but would be reclassified as independent, which would most likely enable the young man to resume receiving financial aid and to return to college.

Potential Legislation and Recommendations

The Committee discussed the following potential legislation:

- (1) Adding a definition of homelessness to the Indiana Code and mirroring aspects of the Federal McKinney-Vento Act. This was suggested by Molly Chamberlain of the State Department of Education. This bill draft will be drafted using the McKinney-Vento definition and it will only be applicable to the education title. Counsel for the Committee will work on this draft with the State Department of Education.
- (2) Permitting emancipated youth to receive homeless and shelter services without

parental approval. Counsel for the Committee is to contact Paulette Moore of the Wheeler Mission, who suggested this idea, to learn about the background of this issue.

- (3) Extending the period of time, from 24 hours to 72 hours, in which a shelter must contact the parents or guardian of a juvenile who is seeking services from a shelter.
- (4) Allowing 16 to 18 year olds to receive homeless services without parental consent, including services from food banks, homeless shelters, and free medical services.
- (5) Creating an information clearinghouse for information concerning services for homeless youth. Also, requiring a determination of the number of individuals who are homeless in Indiana, including the number of homeless youth in Indiana.
- (6) Making the 21st Century Scholars program available to individuals who attain GEDs.

Rep. Avery requested that the following ideas be drafted as bill drafts for the Committee to consider and discuss at the final Committee meeting:

- (1) Allowing foster youth to remain in their home school by providing transportation and waiving district tuition.
- (2) Providing tutoring and mentoring for foster youth.
- (3) Permitting foster youth to have sibling visitation.

The Committee discussed the following potential Committee recommendations, which will be voted on at the final meeting:

- (1) Project Safeplace should be expanded to all counties and provided with adequate funding.
- (2) Centers for runaway youth should receive additional funding and be expanded.
- (3) Providers of homeless services should receive additional funding.

Next Meeting

Representative Avery announced that the previously scheduled meeting on October 16, 2007, is cancelled and the final meeting of the Committee will take place on October 22, 2007, at 1:00 P.M., in Room 404 of the State House.